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SUBJECT: VOTER REGISTRATION UP AND RUNNING - SORT OF

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Although the GoG finally launched its national voter registration campaign on August 28 as the Prime Minister symbolically registered to vote on national television, there are still a number of issues to be resolved before the campaign can truly get underway. The GoG's failure to follow through on its electoral commitments and responsibilities created some last minute roadblocks. A few of these issues have been resolved and the UNDP and the EU are working with the GoG to address the remaining challenges so that the voter registration campaign can be launched in truth. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Guinea finally launched its national voter registration campaign on August 28 after months of delays. Prime Minister Souare, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Political Affairs (MATAP), and the President of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) were the first to be registered, a process that was videotaped and broadcast on the national news network. The PM encouraged the population to register so that they can vote in upcoming elections.

¶3. (SBU) Despite the fanfare, the registration launch was largely symbolic since a number of logistical problems continue to challenge the project. A focus group meeting the day before the launch (which includes participants from the UNDP, the EU, the US Embassy, and USAID contractors) generated a heated debate between the EU and the UNDP about whether to even proceed with a symbolic launch given that so many issues remain unresolved.

¶4. (SBU) For starters, the actual voter registration kits had not yet been sent out into the interior of the country while one of the 14 required registration forms had not yet left the printer. MATAP had not released an approved list of computer operators, which means that these individuals had not received per diem and could not travel to the registration sites. (MATAP had been asked to provide a new list because the first list was reportedly unacceptable due to unexplained fraud.) While 10,500 of the 15,000 voter registrars have been trained, the political parties are wanting to add more names, which has slowed down the process because it would be difficult to do more training, but the parties' requests have to be handled carefully in order to avoid potential contention. Finally, there is a funding gap of \$309,000 that is needed to cover the salaries of computer operators and technical staff.

¶5. (SBU) By late in the day of the registration launch, at least one of the issues had been resolved. The first trucks finally left Conakry for the interior, carrying computer equipment and the required forms. The Minister of MATAP personally assisted with the departure. The GoG issued a communique stating that the voter registration project has been officially launched, but that the actual operation will start within a few days.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Although the donor community has shouldered much of the blame for delays in the getting the voter registration process off the ground, the GoG is probably deserves equally guilty. Many of the remaining logistical problems are due to a lack of movement on the part of the GoG. For example, a seemingly minor issue of paying per diem to local registrars (in the amount of about \$1000 total) became a major roadblock when the GoG failed to come up with the cash. The EU finally told the UNDP to just pay the bill out of the project's budget line item for unanticipated expenses, in order to be able to even hold the symbolic registration. MATAP's lack of planning and coordination raises concerns about the GoG's political will and technical capacity to hold transparent, credible elections. The good news is that the registration process is finally underway, publicly anyway, and should be in truth within the next few weeks. END COMMENT.
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